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ABSTRACT

A mini-conference on rural schools and community development brought together experts in rural community, rural education, and economic development to brainstorm ideas for collaborative projects and produce a helpful conceptual design for use both by rural communities and their schools. This document offers a synthesis and overview of the experts' suggestions, provides background, and represents the end product of the conceptual design project: a set of suggestions to help rural communities and schools retain youth while encouraging their involvement in the community. Good leadership is critical to charting the future of a community. Community leadership must be identified and convened, and should work collaboratively to design and "sell" new educational programs. Education leaders could study ways of incorporating community affairs into the educational curriculum. Specifically, this guide recommends school-based enterprise as a good idea to help students develop their entrepreneurial skills. Suggestions for implementation include getting organized, generating enthusiasm, and winning financial support. Once the community and school leadership have targeted economic development as a priority and a study of community needs has been conducted, the next step is developing an attitude of entrepreneurship in the school setting. Ideas of community development and entrepreneurship should be integrated into the existing curriculum. The guide acknowledges that suggestions for school-based enterprise are time-consuming and require hard work, but it concludes that the idea of collaboration is both exciting and rewarding. (TES)

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RURAL SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT: A CONCEPTUAL DESIGN PROJECT

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Introduction:

Rural schools can be the light at the end of the tunnel for many rural communities. According to Jonathan Sher, President of Rural Education and Development, Inc. "The idea that education is connected to economic development has become one of the cornerstones of the educational reform movement in the 1980's" (Sher, 1987) As communities continue to experience change in all sectors, they will seek human resources, support services, expertise for developing projects and interested volunteers to meet the challenges which face them. Time and again, communities will discover that a good source for supplying these needs will be the school.

Schools have the potential to become more actively involved in meeting these needs. Each faculty member represents a source of talent and knowledge which can, and often does, extend far beyond the classroom. School buildings, facilities, and equipment may be made more affordable through cooperative purchases and maintenance as well as cooperative use. "Schools are a significant physical presence and a major "public infrastructure" investment. In many rural communitites, they are the only public space. (Sher, 1987) Services such as career counseling, skill assessments, and vocational training provided for students can benefit adults in the community as well. And - - when enthusiastic energetic volunteers are needed for community projects of all kinds, the school can

provide those from their rich and readily available "youth resource". The purchasing and payroll power of the school is considerable as well. If all school supplies were purchased locally, the school could likely be the largest local buyer of those types of items. And, in many rural communities the school has the largest and most consistent payroll. In addition, an often overlooked resource is the financial capacity schools have to draw outside dollars into the local economy from private, state and federal sources. (Sher, 1987)

Rural communities have not had to question their own existence until recent years. Communities were established through necessity as trade routes and centers were established and as families and friends banded together in a mutually beneficial relationship. The life blood of so many of our rural communities has been the agricultural or natural resource economy. Because of our growing and constant need for food, fibre and natural resources the stability of those communities supported by those economies was never questioned. When those industries, their patterns of production and their economic structure changed, the community economy and human resource base was threatened. Rural sociologist Daryl Hobbs notes that, "as agriculture has become more mechanized, farm labor has been released and has gravitated toward more urban areas in search of work. Rural to urban migration has become a reality. The rural community has changed as the nature of farming and the farm has changed." (Hobbs, p. 1)

Rural communities are now finding themselves faced with the opportunity and the necessity for formulating creative solutions to economic problems. ". . .the U.S. is now regarded as in a period of transition. But transitions are never as smooth as they appear to be when portrayed on a chart."(Hobbs, p. 12) On a more negative side, however, many communities look at themselves as being in an irreversible state of decline. This attitude, according to Sher, "has become a self-fulfilling negative prophesy. The more we believe in the inevitability of rural decline, the more we act in ways that promote rural decline." (Sher, 1987) Further, Hobbs notes, "A lot of communities in which I work have poverty as their hallmark. They are defined by their poverty. There is a sense of hopelessness and despair in those communities; a sense that very little that's positive can happen because so little that's positive has happened". (Hobbs, p. 1) It is important to remember that the belief that solutions can be found may foster the finding. Complacency can be the greatest enemy in the search for solutions.

Responses to current economic problems are not traditional because the character of the community has changed. The driving force still is that sense of community. But old solutions to new problems will not work. Many communities are finding a renewed sense of pride as they re-experience the challenge of building and directing a cluster of resources - - physical, fiscal and human toward a future.

Schools are in much the same circumstance; they have simply not had to do more than deliver education. Creatively planning the

outcomes of education has not been part of the role of the school. Students were simply given a good education and wished well. Sher states, "It reminds me of a quote attributed to Werner Von Braun, the German rocket scientist. Years after the war, he was asked if he had any moreal qualms about his role in the bombing of London and he replied, 'My job was to make the rockets go up. Where they landed was somebody else's business.' There is an alarming sense in which we, as educators, think our job is to launch students - - but where they land is somebody else's business. Such an attitude not only shortchanges rural students, but also keeps us from making the contributions of which we are capable. We can do better than to perpetuate this attitude. We can do better than 'more of the same.'"(Sher, 1987) There was little thought given to the notion that an individual school should be responsive to the specific needs of the commnity when training future leaders and workers. And, most specifically, little attention was given to making an effort to encourage youth to remain after their education had been completed. It is apparent that the leakage of youth to other communities rivals the leakage of dollars needed to drive local economies.

The school in the rural community has always been an integral and pivotal force - - a rallying point, the focus of community identity, the source for cultural, social, and educational activity. That importance has not been minimized with the changes taking place in our rural communities. If anything it has been enhanced as communities look for resources to remain healthy, progressive and socially solvent.

Rural schools are often the biggest business in the community. Not only are they the largest employer, but often the largest purchaser of goods within the community. It is ironic that our biggest business also may cause a serious economic drain on the community as it prepares young people, our greatest resource, to leave. The exporting of talent when human resources are badly needed is a serious consequence of the approach rural schools have taken.

In an effort to plug the leaks of dollars and youth many rural communities, by necessity, have begun to develop creative ways of developing resources and opportunities designed to provide the excellence in education needed for rural youth and to encourage involvement and participation in the community. As the economy has changed, the need for additional services and business is critical for community health. Involving youth in this process has proven to be an exciting and promising approach.

By nature of the system, rural youth have been taught to strive for more, better, and bigger. The implication has always been that these things were to be found elsewhere - -probably in a larger, "more exciting" community. For communities to change this philosophy has not been much easier than for a leopard to change its spots. It requires a commitment on the part of a community as a whole that the best and most important resource for community health is its youth and that the best place to work with that youth will probably

be through the school setting. "Meeting the need for human capital requires more than producing and retaining more graduates from existing programs. (1) There is a need for basic education to provide skills on which to build other competencies; (2) Students must be more capable of innovation and an environment stressing and expecting innovation is necessary; (3) The need for generalists - - people who have multiple skills - - must be satisfied; (4) There must be team work training for the future needs of group problem solving; (5) There must be an emphasis on continuing adult education as skill needs change, (6) An understanding of the community must also be developed." (Hobbs, p. 30)

Schools have often been insular communities within the larger community, sometimes by design, sometimes by accident. Yet, the rural school has a stake in the community unlike any other entity. Even though, to some degree, the school operates independently of the community, it receives much of its financial support from local property taxes and is heavily dependent on the economic health of the community for meeting ever increasing budgets. Although property taxes have decreased as value of land has depreciated, costs of operating our educational systems have increased as the demands for delivering well educated youth into a society hungry for talent also increase. According to Allan Odden several of the states in the Mid-Continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL) region have experienced stress on their budgets caused by declines in oil and agricultural product prices. This has created a situation where

education excellence inititiatives have not had sufficient funding to be enacted." (Odden, 1987)

Given the responsibility the school has to the financial health of the community, schools must become more responsive to the needs of the community not the least of which is to retain its youth and talent when there is need. Education can be better served when the community is actively used as a resource by the school. A curriculum which includes an emphasis on understanding and strengthening communities by creating jobs, resources, progress can provide a transfusion to an economically anemic community where a focus on seeking jobs only serves to drain the rural community of the talent it needs.

Schools and communities working together in community development projects benefits everyone. "Rural communities are short-handed in their efforts to achieve sustainable economic devlopment and can not afford to overlook any pertinent resource. In an era when knowledge-based economic development is advocated as the key to industrial restructuring and economic competitiveness, creatively fashioning new relationships between school and community has to occupy a position high on the list of priorities."(Hobbs, p. 41)

One of the more innovative and creative approaches is the development of school based enterprises within the school setting designed for spin-off into the community. The steps which must be

followed for paving the way to this type of program are critical and take time. A number of pilot programs have already been developed and successfully implemented.

It is necessary to point out, however, that there are many other things schools and communities can do together for their mutual benefit and the overall economic health of their community. Cooperative use of staffing and facilities can expand shrinking budgets as needs are met through mutual cooperation.

In an effort to outline some suggestions, provide background and deliver a useful product which both rural communities and their schools could use when considering ways to retain youth and to encourage their involvement, participation and their establishment as adults within the same community, a group of experts (see attached list) was assembled for the express purpose of brainstorming approaches to projects of this kind. Their collective opinions and comments have been assimilated in this document which is the end product of the conceptual design project. It is important to note that throughout the small conference where these ideas were shared, there was an overriding feeling that communities have their own unique personalities and that to prescribe a specific approach as being potentially successful for all communities would be inappropriate. The following suggestions are just that - - suggestions. Each of the mini conference participants developing this conceptual design project recognizes that the course for each individual community must be charted in such a way to fit each

community's needs and goals. The project is a preliminary to putting into practice many of the suggestions. A specific outline was developed to lead the discussion toward identifying problems and opportunities in school/community involvement and developing a listing of procedures and suggestions. This document is an overview and synthesis of those suggestions with supplemental materials designed to provide you, the reader, a type of handbook which we hope will be useful in developing a collaborative school/community attitude or project in your community. Each participant was selected to represent a specific area of knowledge, community involvement or experience.

Nothing can be accomplished according to formula but carefully considered guidelines, examples of successes and cautions included may prove useful.

Economic Development - - What is It?

There is a difference between agricultural development and rural development. Especially today, where some communities have lost their strong agricultural economy, unique and creative ways are being sought to substitute a different economic base. Marketing needs, transportation, consumer base and needed services can either be incredible stumbling blocks or challenges for individual communities seeking to "re-group" economically. Education, in the broadest sense, is critical for progress. Retraining is imperative to develop a strong pool of needed skills. Training for future

employment needs is necessary to insure healthy programs. And - - most importantly, knowledge of the community is basic if leaders and community members are to plan the future. Areas of need cannot be targeted and filled unless there is a thorough understanding of community dynamics.

As part of the educational process, it is important that youth observe the importance of community. Eliot Wigginton , in relating the Foxfire experience, notes that" students must have a firm understanding of the contemporary institutions that shape our lives. They must know the inner workings and ultimate purposes of our political systems. They must have an understanding of themselves as members of a society with a history and a future" (Wigginton, 1986). Wringing our hands over the loss of youth will not stem the tide. Active involvement by the community in establishing a future for the community and including youth as a part of that can have significant positive influence. Understanding and involvement can make all the difference in youth looking toward their communities as a place of the future instead of a springboard for exit.

Economic development can be defined as an educational process through which a community learns to survive. During the survival course, it is important to realize that conditions vary between geographical areas and that each community must explore ideas and develop those which work best in that setting. It is also important to note that a stronger base can be realized by developing existing resources than trying to acquire new ones. Although new resources

are like opening the package on Christmas morning - -a wonderful surprise - - they require more energy and effort to acquire. Applying that same energy to developing existing resources can be easier to realize and have a more immediate and long lasting effect. Community planners will affirm the fact that causing existing industry to grow and expand is an easier task than recruiting new industry. Realizing cost benefits can take a long time.

Is Community Development a Legitimate Component of the School's Role? - - -

The role of the school within the community needs to be readdressed. As communities begin to look to the school for educational resources to help achieve community goals, so must schools look toward communities. The more active youth become in the process, the greater is the chance they may wish to remain in the community. A personal investment of time and energy brings with it a commitment to success and an interest in seeing that success happen. Youth also represent one of greatest resources for energy and enthusiasm. It is important to realize that youth involvement must be of genuine educational value and not simply a cheap source of labor. Schools are the only organization within the community which deal on a daily basis with a cross section of the community in its entirety. Each socio-economic group, each cultural or ethnic group, each strata of education, skill and interest is reflected in the school. In fact, the school is a mirror image - - a microcosm - - of the community whole.

I. Community Leadership

Critical to charting the future course of a community is that central core of community members who take the initiative, the responsibility and the lead. Leadership is a difficult term to define. It not only implies being vested with power but grasping opportunities to exert influence as well. Either way, it is generally a "given" that to best influence outcomes in a given community, one must work hand in hand with those selected, appointed or informal leaders. Good results will certainly be more difficult to achieve if the leadership is not identified and included in the process.

A. Identifying Community Leadership

Every community is characterized, among other things, by the power structure which directs the outcomes of projects and influences decisions affecting it. In addition to elected leadership, i.e. city council, mayor, leaders of civic groups and organizations, each community also empowers appointed leaders. An example of such empowered leadership is the school superintendent. In fact, in many cases, the superintendent is the CEO of the most active and vital business in the community - - the school. It is important to remember that rural communities in particular rely on informal leaders - -those who voluntarily take the responsibilities of leadership but who are not appointed or elected to formal leadership positions.

Identifying leaders for the purpose of working collaboratively is critical. Omitting key leaders or including people who have no constituency can be equally disastrous. It is important that we be aware of who makes the decisions within the community before outcomes can be influenced. This process can be made more difficult if multi-group power structures are present. Quite often groups tend to go in diverse directions and finding common ground and common leaders can be equally difficult.

A number of ways for identifying community leaders are included below:

1. Seek the opinion of several key informants who are willing to target those whom they feel influence community decisions. Quite often, the influencers have a more subtle power and are not necessarily the elected officials. Key informants might include leaders of organizations, the newspaper editor, the school superintendent, the banker, the minister of a dominant church in the area, leaders of ethnic groups.

2. Look for those who are willing to take reasonable risks and have demonstrated this by their actions. Causing progress to happen involves stretching of talent, time, knowledge and a wilingness to be involved. It means throwing away the safety net and daring to try the unique. It means not only testing the waters of innovation but jumping in. People willing to do this are critical to this process.

3. Those people who have wealth, wisdom, energy, persistence or organizational skills are those who need to be involved in a project of this type. These are the people who will actively seek to make a project a success.

This is not to say that one should seek enthusiastic individuals who have all of these qualities but, indeed, each characteristic may constitute an individual role. There are those in the community who have resources, of all kinds, which are valuable to support community development projects, persons who have knowledge and expertise which can be applied and people who are willing and have the time to apply their interest and enthusiasm to such a project but who may lack resources and/or expertise. A mixture of all these types is critical for project success.

4. Quite often those most frequently known as "movers and shakers" do not constitute the power base in a community, but they are the key to identifying those who most significantly influence decisions.

An outside expert , i.e. state extension service, department of commerce, university regional planning council, small business development center, can help facilitate the identification of community leaders in addition to helping convene the leadership to determine the desire to work collaboratively on a development project. However, the school superintendent may also be key in identifying those who constitute the power structure in the community.

Keep in mind that the power structure in a community is generally small, subtle in how it influences the community and quite proficient at delegating authority to others. This group is not known for obvious leaders and tends to work behind the scenes. By the same token, they are the most critical to have involved if projects are designed to influence the future of that community. Without their involvement and support, activities may be initiated, but little nurturing will occur.

B. The Process of Convening Community Leadership

Initially, one wouldn't think that there would be great difficulty in calling together interested community members to develop ideas of how that community might invest in its own future. But, indeed, there can be resistance to this idea, especially in smaller communities which may have concentrated pockets of traditionalists or conservative thinkers who have watched the community change in slow and deliberate stages.

There are, however, some assumptions that must be made in order to be successful in this arena.

First - - the community needs to be involved with the school on a greater level than providing an enthusiastic audience for extracurricular activity. Convincing both school staff and community members of this fact is not as easy as one might think. It is critical at this stage that the person or persons doing the inviting be

enthused and well informed about perceived community and school needs.

Second - - If a project is to be successful, it is not necessary that it arise from a concensus of the community, but must certainly enjoy a great degree of community support.

Third - - A large group of participants may not be able to arrive at concrete suggestions for collaborative efforts. After the first meeting, an advisory council may be needed to continue working on those suggestions which arise during the first meeting.

Fourth - - It is critical that the facilitator who conducts that first meeting be skilled, respected and knowledgeable of the community. Quite often, an outside facilitator may be able to help interested community leaders in working through turf issues and personal crusades. If issues become intense, the outside facilitator has the advantage that they can leave the community when it's over. In addition, an outside facilitator is able to question and to make observations which a local person could not do.

In some instances, an outside facilitator may not be trusted to the extent that is needed for a productive meeting to take place. A local leader who is not a member of the power structure may be able to fill this role. The decision about who shall be the initial leader can be made by elected leadership (city council, mayor) .

Once the initial meeting (s) have taken place where ideas are shared and a mutual agreement is reached that schools and community need to work together for the economic development of the community, an advisory committee can be appointed. This committee should heavily involve the "movers and shakers", not necessarily the power structure of the community. This group should be small in number (4-9 participants) whose mission is to gather information about the community, potential projects and begin to initiate a sense of collaboration between the school and the community.

This is one way to facilitate a project of this type. However, a formal structure like this may actually impede progress in some instances, so it is important that the personality of the community and the school be reflected in whatever group or structure is provided to lend this type of support.

It is also critical that time lines be established so that the work of the committee can be easily facilitated. Many good projects "die on the vine" simply because there is no push to keep them on target. Don't make the success of a worthwhile project vulnerable to human error and group dynamics when that can be avoided.

C. Convincing the Community and Educational Leadership

The best ideas in the world can simply lay dormant if those whom they affect most directly are luke warm about their success. It is critical during the process of convening leaders that those who are

initiating this activity be positive in their attitudes, supremely enthusiastic about this mutual venture, and convinced that their community has a bright future. It is a fact that community leadership generally is more receptive to this type of activity than the school system. Schools have tended to be very insular in their relationship with the community. Schools have seen themselves performing a necessary service and the need to work with communities for their mutual health has not been felt until recently. Indeed, there is often the feeling that pursuing such a project might lead to more active interest in the school and a desire to control what happens there. In fact, schools have not traditionally seen their role as a community collaborator at all.

On the other hand, local businesses often react negatively to the notion of a mutual economic development project because they sense a potential for competition. Additionally, the business community quite often believes that schools have no expertise, relevant resources or a mandate to engage in economic development activity. The fact is that for any type of project to be a success, there must be mutual agreement. Communities must understand that the school is not competing with business but enhancing it. Businesses must realize that they have something to offer and that they can be the best teachers for their communities' future leaders. It is also important that the business community realize and understand that the very survival of rural communities depends on the retention of their youth. The point must be made that investment in education is closely linked with the economic well-being of the community.

It is critical that, from start to finish, media be heavily involved. The media must be included and convinced. This is more difficult than it may sound. If there are no local county or regional newspapers or publication that give substantive coverage of the community, it is suggested that a newsletter might be one of the first projects to be implemented.

The heaviest public relations efforts, however, should occur once the project is implemented. This is the point where community members can be most critical and need the most positive feedback. It is also a good way to include the community in a "committee of the whole" which is vitally interested in nurturing the success of such a project.

Making good decisions about projects which have high probability of success must be based on factual information about the community and the school. The collection of that data, if done by students, can be an invaluable learning experience. The data can build to something useful for the future and the collection of it has a high probability of initial success. It is critical that the dissemination of the results must be done on a wide scale and that students have opportunitites to share their results with community groups.

D. Selling the Need to Work Together - -

There is nothing like good factual information to foster the realization that something must be done. Collecting data which can demonstrate change within the community and the positive and negative effects of that change can provide the basis for action. The community and the school then must decide if the demonstrated changes and trends need to be guided or reversed. If there is agreement, this legitimizes the need for collaboration.

A key player may be the school superintendent. In small rural communities where superintendents are mobile, their credibility may be inversely proportional to the distances they cover. Convincing community leadership of the need for working together is the single most important task to achieve before success can be realized. Providing specific examples of mutual benefits which can accrue both to business/community and to the school is necessary for building a collaborative relationship. In addition, elected officials need to be convinced to support the project. In fact, everyone who needs to be involved must feel that they are an integral part of the project for it to be successful.

E. Roadblocks to Collaborative Relationships:

Unfortunately, the roadblocks can be many and varied. Recognizing them in advance can make achieving the success much easier. The following listing includes some of those roadblocks with suggestions for overcoming them.

1. A "paper committee" of influential names and no active participants will not get the work done. Being clear with those who wish to be a part of such an effort that they are needed for more than just their name or endorsement is important.

2. Often students are not included as an active participant in community planning groups. A concerted effort to allow this to happen is critically important if the project is to foster education.

3. Questions about revising curricula will be expressed as soon as the school expresses its desire to be an active participant. Assuring those concerned that curriculum changes will be made only as needed and with the full participation of teachers, parents, and community members should alleviate some of these concerns.

The fact of the matter is that major curriculum revisions may be needed to implement such a program. School staff will need to be aware and well-trained in order to understand that basic concepts and skills needed by all students can be taught differently within the framework of this program.

4. If the project is an enterprise where goods or services are sold, there may be concern about the fact that products may cost more than they do away from home. The fact is that once additional costs of transportation are included, purchasing locally becomes more economical. The multiplying effect of dollars which stay in the community more than offsets the savings in buying cheaper goods

elsewhere. Community members need to be made aware that paying higher prices may be a conscious investment they can make in the community in order that the local economy be strengthened. Working cooperatively toward a healthier community involves many facets of community life. Retaining dollars within the community through an effort of this type can make a considerable difference in economic health.

5. Concern over supplemental duties by teachers can present problems if not expeditiously handled early in the process. The fact is, not every teacher needs to be involved and, quite often, there will be one or two enthusiastic teachers who relish the thought of expanding their own professional horizons in this way, even without additional compensation. However, if compensation is needed, shares in the enterprise may be one way to take care of this problem.

6. Concern over taxes rising to accomodate the expense of such a project is frequent. It is important to emphasize that decisions will be made which reflect community and school needs, goals and resources. The ultimate goal is to create self-sustaining, if not profitable programs and/or businesses. Securing financial resources to fund such projects is an entrepreneurial venture as well. All avenues must be explored including reallocating existing resources which may be funding career track programs which are producing little or no results.

7. One of the more difficult areas to tackle is the reality that a great deal of time is required. However, the time invested can be primarily student time and if properly organized, the time required of local businesses/community members can be managed. Those expecting immediate results may be disappointed. School boards with immediate agendas, personnel changes and teenage expectations for immediate gratification are all problems which are enhanced by the time such a program takes.

8. Additionally, the question of who gets the enterprise if more than one community is served can be a touchy area. Community rivalries on the playing field can extend very directly into instructional programs where collaborative efforts are required. Keeping all interested parties well informed and involved can help to solve these problems. Each individual case must be decided differently based upon the unique characteristics of each. Phasing the enterprise may take care of part of this problem. However, that cannot always be done. It may be that more than one enterprise of this type may need to be created so that one offsets the other.

9. A lack of confidence from the community is a roadblock which can be sudden death. Constant use of the local media can prevent this as well as continual reporting on the progress of the enterprise. A lack of confidence can be fostered if the press coverage is negative, so it is important that the media be well informed and involved in a positive way. Keeping communication lines open is critical.

The key to the success of such an effort is to encourage and assist the people who are most enthusiastic and willing to devote the effort and enthusiasm to such a project. Attitudes of community leaders will determine their personal involvement in such a project. Through this involvement of interested volunteers, there will be a growth of community pride. A personal investment, even if time is the only input, creates a better habitat for success.

The bottom line is that there is a need for schools and communities to work closely together. Time is a precious commodity and re-inventing the wheel can be costly. Working together can prevent that from happening. What students can learn from business is limitless as is the value of active, vital educational programs to a community who wants to progress and stay healthy.

II. COMMUNITY AS A RESOURCE

Most young people could tell us a great deal about federal and state governments, history and environments and very little about their own home town. It is no wonder then that our youth look beyond their own environment for building a future. Awareness of the community can provide options to our youth which may otherwise go undiscovered.

The study of one's local community can provide interesting insight into needs and resources which might otherwise go unnoticed. It's

very easy to take for granted, that which we think we observe each day. When, in fact, being close to something, such as our community, can actually be a barrier to recognizing very important factors which may integrally important to our individual roles in the community.

Youth are no exception. They must be led to observe and appreciate their own environments. Parents do this within the home, but quite often we, as educators, fail to take into account the need for developing this community familiarity with our students. The community study not only can help to overcome this lack of knowledge but can develop a sense of personal commitment to the community through the understanding of how the individual can best make a difference.

A. Ways to Study the Community

There are a number of effective methods for community study. The most important thing to remember is to select those methods best suited to your community, the group doing the study and the intended use of the data. What kind of information and in what depth the information needs to be will determine the techniques used. (Note: Small Towns and Small Towners by Burt Swanson provides some valuable information on conducting community studies)

The community study can facilitate two basic outcomes. First, it is an excellent educational tool for teaching youth about their

community, it's economy and characteristics, and their roles as active community members. In addition, the knowledge gained of how to make practical use of data collection and analysis is invaluable. The end result often is that the student becomes an empowered citizen sensing a personal investment in community progress.

The second outcome is the actual knowledge of the community itself and the use which can be made of this knowledge. No matter how long one lives in a community, there are always valuable new things which can add to an individuals awareness - - in developing new perspectives from which to make decisions, chart courses, or to plan development. For this reason, many communities actively engaged in community development, employ outside experts to conduct such studies. Seeing the community through new eyes can provide insights that long-time residents might miss.

Methods and techniques for conducting such studies are numerous. and varied. A few are listed below:

1. The Town Meeting - - much can be learned from questioning local citizenry in a group situation about their priorities for action, their impressions of their community - - its failings and strengths.

2. Interviews - - The caution here is that interviewees must be selected carefully. A good cross section of economic status, careers, age groups, ethnic groups, etc. is important if the interview method is

to have any significance for making predictions from the data collected.

3. Observation - - (Sometimes called Awareness Walks) The data gatherer simply observes the community from as many perspectives and angles as possible. A lot can be learned about local business, for example, by counting the number of businesses, observing their patterns of doing business, noting the types of businesses, etc. To develop a comprehensive view of the community in its entirety, however, a number of significant features of the community must be observed including: local churches, business, government agencies, schools, community infrastructure, residential areas, services, to name a few. It is also important to observe how these various entities work together or separately to achieve their individual goals.

4. Data Collection/Surveys - - Probably the most effective method for gathering useful information is the survey. In order for the survey to be valid, however, a significant number of surveys must be completed and returned and the population surveyed must represent all segements of the community. Survey questions must be designed so that they do not lead the individual toward specific answers. If your community is not fond of "reinventing the wheel", there are professionally prepared surveys which can be obtained through a number of agencies (state extension service, community planning agencies, department of commerce) which should do the trick.

5. Outside Experts - -Although this in itself may not be a technique so much as a method for accomplishing the task. A trained professional may provide a more objective view of how this information might be gathered. Their own opinions do not cloud the results, either.

The students and the school can facilitate the study. Not only will students discover new ways of viewing their own community, but the skills they will learn in developing methods, executing the study, and reporting on the results are the tools for quality learning.

B. Agencies and Resources to Aid in Community Study

The act of designing and executing a study can be a valuable educational experience for a young person. However, there are significant sources of information which can supplement the community study. Understanding these sources and the types of information available can also be valuable. Various agencies can provide pertinent facts about the nature of the individual community. Before beginning the quest for data, however, it is important to list what information is needed, what facts will be useful in making the decisions which need to be made. Those facts include: business activity (business needs, numbers, types, local buying patterns), demographic data, tax base, available services, infrastructure, power structure and leadership, employment

statistics, community involvement, economic base (the nature/balance of trade), community attitudes toward economic growth, assets and liabilities of the community, financial resources within the community, transportation needs, isolation from metropolitan areas, geographical characteristics, and land use policies.

Sources of information for collecting data include:

Voter District (voting record may or may not indicate the level of community involvement)

County Offices (information on population of the county, use of property, etc.)

Extension Service (If there is an economic development division on the state level, they are apt to have information regarding how dollars are spent within the community, the leakage of those dollars from the community, which businesses appear to be most necessary and which are needed that the community does not have).

State Department of Economic Development or Chambers of Commerce - - More specific information about the future, current health, and adequacy of business within the community can be obtained here. In addition, there may be information suggesting the business needs of specific communities.

Small Business Development Centers - -Again, there may be information regarding business potential and prognosis

School System - -School districts will be able to offer pertinent information regarding how much is spent per student on education, the costs to the district of obtaining that education.

County Historical Society - -In order to chart a future course, it is necessary to know where the community has been. This group should be able to provide an overall perspective of the community and its growth and change from a historical point of view. This is valuable if the tenor of the community is to be maintained.

Census - -This is an excellent source of demographic data which is very important to know. Average age of the community, numbers of families, average salary, and above all - -changes from previous census years can provide an overview of community change that will be useful in determining what course to chart in the future.

Labor Department - -Statistics regarding levels of employment and training are critical when making choices about mutual economic development efforts.

League of Municipalities - -In many states an organization by this name or one similar actively collects data of all kinds about communities within the state.

Regional/Area Planning Commissions - - These are becoming more common all the time as communities discover that unplanned growth or no growth at all are equally unsatisfactory and that enlisting the expertise of professional planners working with commitees appointed for this purpose can correct both. In order that their work go smoothly, a large quantity of data must be collected to help in making the decisions which must be made. Individual communities can have access to this data.

State Library - -There are several excellent resources which can be found here such as community historical records, zoning and land use requirements and background of local government decisions.

State Department of Transportation - -In order that roads be built and repaired, demographic data must be collected to determine their use. This data, collected by the State Department of Transportation, is available upon request.

C. Integrating Community Study into the Curriculum

Collecting useful data which will be put to good use is a much more exciting educational project than recollecting what has been gathered many times before. The question then remains, where in the curriculum should the community study be taught, and who should be the one to teach those skills?

There are several ways to address the community study in the school setting:

1. Integrate the study into one or more course areas.
2. Develop a separate course area called Community Development
3. Develop the community study as an extra-curricular activity.

4. Tie the community study to an existing extra curricular activity tied to a curricular area, i.e. Vo-Ag/FFA, Business/DECCA, FHA/Home Economics.

On the one hand, it would seem to fall most naturally into a social studies curriculum where the local community and citizenship are covered. However, the interdisciplinary approach where several teachers collaborate may be the most effective way. Certainly the actual development of the survey teaches thinking skills, language arts. Math becomes active when the data are analyzed. If students are required, and they should be, to present their findings before the community development advisory council or other civic groups, public speaking and communications play an active role.

The structure of most current schooling is the biggest barrier to building an idea like this into a curriculum in an inter-disciplinary way. The school will need to address the problems of adjusting time in a school day and restructuring time to fit a project of this sort. Extended school days may be a help in this. There is even the possibility that community development as a course might be the best route to follow. However, one should first consider the overall objectives of the school and the total curriculum before merely creating a new course.

In order for the community study to be implemented as a part of the curriculum, the question of how a student can become involved in administering the study must be answered. Quite simply, there is

nothing about the study which a student, willing and able, cannot accomplish without guidance and encouragement. Students can develop the survey instrument, collect, analyze and present the data. Students can certainly write news articles and media releases explaining the study both before and after. One of the most valuable parts of the learning process is in the final reporting. Students presenting their findings to civic groups or planning commissions will benefit from sharing a project which has practical application to the world in which they live. Armed with the facts, students can then take an active role in convincing community and school leadership that a mutual effort in economic development which involves students can be valuable and healthy for the community.

Students do not have innate skills enabling them to conduct effective community studies. Who then, shall teach them? Since this type of exercise is not unlike conducting research in a number of academic areas, many teachers will be adequately qualified. However, bringing in local business leaders not only can provide an exciting dimension to learning but can be the planting of the seed of future community development projects between schools and community. Business leaders often have developed knowledge for conducting marketing and consumer surveys which can easily be translated into a broader survey of a community. In this type of situation, teachers can learn along with their students. The business/community/school partnership can be cemented by active involvement in this learning process.

As an alternative to these methods, there are numerous experts whose livlihood revolves around collecting accurate information about a variety of communities. Professionals working in the area of sociology, extension, marketing and research are generally available and eager to help students learn these skills. The key to making this an exciting learning experience is to enlist the help of someone who is eager and enthusiastic to share that knowledge and who can dispense with standard jargon and methodology if the circumstances so indicate.

D. Using the Information

There is nothing more discouraging to anyone than to invest time, talent, enthusiasm and energy in a project in which no one has interest. It is important, therefore, before the survey process begins to determine how the information will be used. Students focusing on a definite outcome will be more apt to invest time in their own learning. It is critically important that once the data are collected that they are translated into a meaningful description of the community. At this point, expert help may be required to assist the students in interpreting that data. The data should aid in determining assets and shortcomings of the community which can be developed into an action agenda to solve problems and plan for the future.

The actual selling of the value of the study to the community really needs to precede the development of the study. But, there will always need to be a certain amount of selling once the study is completed. The fact that students are required to report their findings in a meaningful way to those who can most use the information (school board, chamber of commerce, etc.) will keep the community informed and give the students some accountability and credibility for their work. This personal contact, spiced with the enthusiasm of youth, can make great inroads toward collaborative community development. Conducting a study is no easy task, but schools are a prime source of enthusiastic, energetic manpower. It is important to point out to community and school leadership that this type of educational process will help students learn ideas that can be transferred into real life settings.

III. Beginning Small Businesses

This can be the most exciting step of all . Unfortunately, the tendency may be to skip the previous steps and get right to the heart of the matter. In reality, the heart is the community's needs and the school's role in helping to fill those needs while providing quality educational experiences at the same time.

The school based enterprise is a simple idea. Students research, plan, set up, operate and own economically-viable small businesses in cooperation with local educational institutions. There is a classroom

component to the program as well as an experiential component. An example of such a business is the New York-Way-Off Broadway Delicatessen which was created by a group of rural high school students from St. Pauls High School in St. Pauls, North Carolina. The deli serves sandwiches and frozen yogurt to travelers using Interstate 95. It has had great success due, in large part, to the fact that the type food served is something travelers from the eastern cities enjoy. This enterprise, like many others, is scheduled to spin off into the community as a regular business once the student owners graduate. These student owners will have right of first refusal in the purchase of the business. (Sher, 1987)

When initiating and developing a school based enterprise, it is important to do so with the idea that that entrepreneurial venture will possibly spin off to the community. For that reason, fitting the enterprise to the needs of the community is critical. This is where the community survey can be very useful. Part of that survey should provide an analysis of the community's economic base. The demographics of the community are also important. Rural communities often have difficulty financially in providing needed services. A school based enterprise could help fill those needs. The fact is, many of our rural communities are aging. A large proportion of the population is over the age of 60 and the need for services for the elderly is significant.

The involvement of an advisory council can be helpful at this point when initiating new business is being discussed. Providing an

opportunity for brainstorming with students about possible enterprises can determine needs as well as student interest. The community may need a particular type of business, but it must be one that is adapted easily to student management and ownership.

The important thing is to start. Where to begin is the issue. The community study will provide a basis for developing a list of possibilities. The feasible alternatives which arise from this study must then be prioritized using a number of factors - -fit to community, fit to student operation and interest, ability to stand on its own as a community enterprise. From that point, students should develop a business plan not unlike what anyone wishing to start a business would be required to develop to show to any lender. During this same process needed resources should be targeted, including sources for venture capital.

It is likewise important that key people be involved. Who are these key people? Students, of course, who are interested in ownership of a school-based enterprise should be involved. If there has been an advisory council appointed, their involvement would be needed. Numbers on the advisory council should be kept to a reasonable level (less than 12) so that the council can function effectively. A listing of resource people who are skilled and knowledgeable about a business of the type selected should be targeted. School administrators must also be involved as well as the banker, the local CPA and others who may have contact with the business on any

other than a consumer level. And, finally, it is important that there be a designated adult supervisor. Because this is a time consuming role, the supervisor could be compensated from the profits of the business or be given shares in the business. This does not need to be a teacher.

On a negative, but nonetheless, important note, it is equally important that those who could kill or harm the enterprise be identified. A concerted effort to win those people over must be made.

A. School Policies about School-Based Enterprises

Before the school based enterprise can be initiated, the school must give its sanction to the activity. Several items must be considered.

1. It is important that whatever the enterprise, it not be competitive with existing community businesses.
2. A policy must be developed which will aid the school board in making decisions about the endorsement of a project.
3. Criteria for board approval must also be developed.
4. Critical questions such as "Who is responsible for the debt" must be addressed.
5. In fact, some communities have developed a corporate entity to protect the school and absorb the financial risk.

6. The enterprise itself must be an appropriate activy for high school students - - this needs to be determined in advance by as part of the criteria for board approval.

B. Incubating the Project

Before you begin, it is wise to develop the flexibility needed to make changes when the enterprise does not seem to flourish. Failure should not be anticipated but set backs will happen. To adequately nurture the project is critical to its success. The most important nurturing quality is perseverance and patience. Youth generally have little of the latter and must be prepared that it may take time before the kind of success they feel they need will be realized.

In addition, staff development activities which foster the development of creativity and positive thinking in the school setting is important. Staff, although not directly involved, need to be continually updated.

There must be a high level of accountability built in to the project. Students should report constantly to the community, to boards of directors of local civic organizations, PTA, teacher organizations, etc. At the same time an information campaign should be initiated in the community. Periodic media releases with pictures showing the business in progress should be given to local media. If there is no local media, posters could be prepared and distributed at local points of interest, a community newsletter could be developed and

distributed or perhaps attention given in the school newsletter and distributed more widely to the community.

Ultimately, the best nurturing comes from those adult supervisors willing to allow the students to make decisions and implement them. At the same time, however, technical assistance from local resource people as well as external sources may be needed and the ability to ask for that assistance should be built into the project. Students must also be required to continually learn about how to manage and operate a business better. As was previously suggested, developing seminars for the student business may also have great applicability to the adult learner. This, in itself, is a valuable ingredient for community development

Preparing for the eventual outcome, whether success or failure, is important. Positive attitudes should always be maintained and as long as both are treated as learning situations, there can be no failure. At the same time, it should not be made easy to fail. There should be some consequences for failure in the enterprise.

Sometimes the successful enterprise is as difficult to deal with as one which isn't. The tendency is for the school to want to hold on to the successful business.

C. Finding Financial Resources

The quality of the business plan will determine how well it will attract financing. Of course, waiting for capital to find the business may mean a very long wait. At the outset, it is wise to identify stages within the business plan and to target financial resources needed for each stage. This will enable there to be a sequence of financing ventures which can add to the strength of the enterprise and may be easier to obtain in smaller communities.

There are three basic stages in developing an entrepreneurial program which will require funding.

1. The educational program which must be delivered in order that this venture be truly educational in nature and scope will require curriculum development, possible staffing needs and staff development. An educational program plan and curriculum must be developed. This could conceivably be accomplished as other curriculum changes are made.

2. Program Support in the form of activities associated with developing attitudes of entrepreneurship excluding skills training. Working community relationships must be established. Community participation is needed as curriculum study or review team is established.

3. Financing of the school-based business itself is the third and final stage.

Given the nature of the first two categories, it is most likely that School Board support is in order. However, once the actual financing

of the business is needed, there may need to be some creative planning to insure this happening.

Stage legislation governing spending by school districts may need to be reviewed. In fact, if this is an inhibiting factor, an effort on the part of several districts interested in this approach to community development may need to actively lobby for change. On the other hand, state dollars may be available as several states have special funding packages available for rural communitites.

It is important to begin with the local community first. Closer ties to investors will enhance the opportunities for success. It is likewise important that, even though the business is owned and operated by young people, that it be treated like any other business. It is through this approach that students will learn most and be able to survive in the real world once the business spins off.

There are a number of ways to seek financing. Some local chambers of commerce have economic development programs which include incentives for new businesses. The local advisory board may be of considerable help in developing sources for risk capital . A local development corporation may need to be developed to handle financing. Grants could also be written through Chapter II, Carl Perkins or JTPA funds.

Another good source for funding are those individuals in the community who are already providing financial support in the form

of scholarships. Businesses which have been developed as school based businesses could be prime supporters of new businesses. In fact,. that may be something which should be specified in the business plan. There is also the possibility of developing a partnership with an existing local business . It may be in the best interest of that business to invest in a business which offers some type of support service which previously had to be sought elsewhere. A good business plan should be fundable from the usual sources; however, donations may be in order, especially if funding sources are difficult to access.

Of course, local banks should be contacted as well as other sources of commercial capital. The most difficult obstacle to overcome is the lack of collateral available. School districts may not wish to encumber property and students generally do not have sufficient collateral to insure a business loan. However, if the business is such that signed contracts for services can be obtained in advance., those contracts can act as collateral. The fact is, when seeking capital for starting a business, small amounts are often more difficult to obtain than larger. For that reason, it may make some sense for a local special services co-operative to acquire larger quantities which can then be distributed to local school districts engaging in the establishment of school based enterprises. Establishing an economic development mill levy might also provide a source of risk capital on a local level.

Through this process there should be several active partners seeking capital: the school system, local banks, private corporations and the students themselves.

D. Organizational Preparations and Structures for Spinning Off Successful Small Businesses

Finally, as the business develops there should be in place some criteria for spinning off the business. Additionally, criteria must be developed for who is eligible to take over the business once those students involved have graduated or at the time of spin-off. Contracts should be made with time lines included and a written plan for how and when the business will spin off into the community. In addition, there are a variety of legal issues which must be considered. All of these issues must be dealt with on an individual basis by individual communities.

School Boards will need to develop policies involving rules for business involvement and operation. For example the following might be included in such policy:

1. All students working with the enterprise have the right to become an owner but do not have to be an owner.
2. Any student working in the business must take education support classes which teach business skills.
3. All owners must work in the enterprise.

4. Methods for purchasing a part of the business if investment capital is unavailable to the individual student.

If the ultimate purpose in developing school based enterprises is as it should be - -to enhance community development through a collaborative community/school effort and to provide educational opportunities for students which may provide increased community awareness and opportunities for staying in their home communities, the school based business must be looking to a future position as a community business. In fact, that should be a condition of the entrepreneurial program. The school acts as an incubator, nurturing the business in its early stages as students learn what they need to know to "leave the nest."

There should be a time limit established for spin off. At the same time, the first right of purchase of a business whose time has come to spin off to the community must belong to the students who founded it. Perhaps the second right of purchase should be to the adult supervisor who has been working with the students. Following the refusal by both parties, the school then can make the decision to retain the business or to sell it. It is important, however, that the school not elect to retain the business simply because of its success and refuse the opportunity to purchase it to the students. That sometimes happens in cases where the business provides very good public relations exposure or is highly successful.

In addition to specifying how the business must be sold, the price is also critical. A formula for determining that price should be specified and agreed upon at the outset. That formula should reflect the actual investment in the business plus a reasonable level of interest or profit share.

IV. Developing an Attitude of Entrepreneurship Within the School Setting.

Once community and school leadership have targeted economic development as a priority for collaboration and a study of the community to provide necessary background for understanding and determining community needs has been conducted, the next step is to determine how that can take place. This is not an instant process. Developing a school based enterprise doesn't happen over night. The atmosphere within the school must be nurtured to provide the support and encouragement for students to become actively involved. In addition, if our rural youth are to be encouraged to stay within the community after graduation, their eyes must be opened to creative avenues for allowing that to happen.

Entrepreneurship is owning and operating an economic enterprise. But doing it must be preceded by the feeling that it can be done. Developing that attitude and providing that atmosphere can be a part of the role of the school. Attitudes of positive self concept,

independent thinking and confidence are important to entrepreneurship. The single most important characteristic of an entrepreneur is perseverance and the ability to fail and start again. Schools need to help students develop this kind of attitude. In some instances, traditional methods may need to be altered to allow the failures to become successes. Risk taking and indpendent thinking are equally important. As with all learning, the younger you begin, the better. Making certain that elementary students know that they always have permission to ask questions is a beginning. Elementary students can begin to look toward the community as something to learn about. There are various economic education programs available which begin in the elementary grades.

But, before students can be molded, teachers must be given the tools to teach them. Staff development programs are critical in making staff aware and sensitve to this idea so they can enhance or integrate these attitudes in teaching. One way to accomplish this is through the personal testimony of other teachers who have been involved in school based enterprises. In addition, business people who began from nothing relating their experiences can develop a foundation for teaching the attitudes necessary. In addition, there are special interest groups (Ag in the Classroom, Environmental Education,) with excellent resources for teaching about specific areas which open new horizons for learning.

From a practical standpoint, students can actively participate in an educational way in existing projects such as concession stands.

Students need to be made aware of the time, energy and commitment required to be a successful entrepreneur. Community supporters can help provide guidance and enrichment by sharing their experiences with the students. After all, the school can be a resource for solving problems and a laboratory for economic development. The atmosphere is generally ripe for this to happen as teachers desire to be active participants in their communities as well.

A. Integrating Community Development Concepts and Entrepreneurship into Existing Curriculum

The two most effective methods for working with students are to develop a separate course or to integrate community development concepts, skills and attitudes relating to entrepreneurship into existing curriculum areas. It is important to note that developing an attitude of entrepreneurship and teaching skills of good business management are not the same thing. Entrepreneurship is an act of imitation. Students will learn most by observing skilled entrepreneurs and by constantly being encouraged to use their own creativity. It is important that there be rewards for student initiative, that positive attitudes be cultivated and that students have the opportunity to engage in a variety of problem solving activities.

At the same time, there should be courses, seminars or workshops which focus on business management. A good resource for developing such courses would be the small business development centers within individual states, the state Chamber of Commerce,

state Department of Commerce. These courses would also enable the local school district to strengthen the partnership between school and community by making space available for adult learners in the community who may also need this type of skill training.

It is important that the overall organization of the school reflect the mission of active participation in community development In the earliest stages, models will need to be developed and staff targeted who are willing and able to actively work in this area. Parent involvement is also very important as is active participation by the community. The pedagogy of how to help students learn these concepts and the techniques teachers use in the classroom are important considerations in addition to that actual integration of concepts into the curriculum.

In essence, there needs to be three focal points for creating a well-rounded educational experience for students and for developing the kind of attitude which will foster economic development projects from within the school setting.

1. Emphasis in all curriculum areas on creativity, rewarding initiative, problem solving and developing a positive attitude.
2. Integration into curricula or separate course which teaches the community and need for community development
3. Workshops, courses, etc. where business skills are taught.

B. Keeping the Program Vital:

Once begun, the hardest part will be to keep the program vital. There should be a constant flow of community people assisting at all levels. If a curriculum has been developed, and it should be, it must be continually updated to adjust to the existing community as well as the changes in business.

An on-going community survey will keep the community and school aprised of changes which might affect school based enterprises. The key to providing a solid base for this type of program is that it become institutionalized. In otherwords, it should become part of the routine of schooling. Shifting personnel may also be important so that new ideas and attitudes are continually being infused into the program. In some cases, enthusiasm and energy may surpass experience in importance. The key is to work slowly. Don't try to make it all happen overnight. A program that is developed slowly may actually last longer As school based enterprises are developed, begin with one that will have a high probability of success. Success creates success.

The whole area of school based enterprises and of mutual cooperation between schools and communities in economic development projects is exciting. A note of caution needs to be struck, however. Most will agree that for schools to be active participants there must be sound educational benefit available for students. Delivering a good education in any area takes time and this is no exception. Working through the steps previously outlined is critical and time consuming. From the outset, if a school decides to

set as its goal the development of school based enterprises, one can easily expect two years of preliminary work before reaching the planning stages for the enterprises. The community study alone, if done thoroughly, can easily take a year to complete. Developing supplementary curriculum and delivering adequate staff development programs can consume at least another year.

It is also wise to note that there is considerable effort needed toward the end of fitting the school's needs to those of the community and arriving at mutually beneficial projects of all kinds. The personality of the community must be evaluated carefully before engaging in collaborative efforts. And, leadership must be convinced before any effort can be successful.

Yet the whole idea of working together for the benefit of both and the eventual rentention of youth in the community can be exciting, rewarding and a positive step toward insuring the future health of the individual community.

V. Summary

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